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ABSTRACT

This Vocational Instructional Management System (VIMS) module offers instructional and cognitive strategies used by special needs students to gain academic and vocational competency in business and office technology. Nine definitions, 14 frequently asked questions, 3 resources, and 18 references are included. The following questions are answered: Why is learning about strategies useful? What strategies might be used? Why are instructional and cognitive strategies important? What instructional and cognitive strategies could students use for mastering competencies in written communication skills? What strategies can assess the appearance of a paper? What strategies can revise a paper? What strategy might locate local sources of occupational information for student job seekers? How can this strategy be implemented in the classroom? What strategy prepares students for presentation of new concepts? How can students gain information about business careers? What cognitive strategy could help students in job seeking? What cognitive strategy integrates the process of reading, writing, speaking, and listening? and What additional resources could students use in business education? (six sources are listed). The following resources are included: (1) VIMS competencies corresponding to this module; (2) questioning strategy; and (3) careers in business and office technology. (NLA)

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Strategies for Learners With Special Needs in Business and Office Technology

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Abstract:
This module offers instructional and cognitive strategies that can be used to enable students to gain academic and vocational competency in the area of Business and Office Technology.

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Overview

Advances in technology have focused attention on the crucial need to raise the level of academic standards of students in our nation's schools. Occupations are emerging that require increased levels of computational, reading and communication skills. Sarkees, Wircenski and West (1990) point out that special needs learners often lack the foundation in basic academic skills that will enable them to succeed in school or on the job. In order to create and maintain a well informed, competent, and competitive workforce it is essential to find ways to integrate vocational subject material with academics.

The field of Business Education offers many opportunities to combine academic skills with vocational education. The business program provides for the general educational needs of all students in the areas of business and economic understanding, while vocational preparation offers specific occupational opportunities as well as long-term career possibilities (Instructional Materials Laboratory, 1990).

Increasingly, those in business and office occupations require good reading skills to adequately interact with the ever expanding advances in office technology. In addition, adequate writing ability is a necessity in communicating with customers and provides the documentation essential to the workplace.

The purpose of this module is to provide the instructor and student with strategies to teach and acquire knowledge in the area of business and office technology. These strategies focus primarily on the area of written communication and provide opportunities to integrate academics with vocational competencies. The Vocational Instructional Management System (VIMS) competencies discussed in this module include:

1. Using written communication skills competency #070601 B001-008
2. Seeking a job competency # 070601 J010.

(See list of VIMS competencies for Business and Office on page 12)

Definitions

Mnemonic Mnemonic refers to specific reconstruction of target content intended to tie new information more closely to a learner's existing knowledge base thereby facilitating retrieval (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1990).

Modeling	Modeling is a strategy in which instructors and students can provide examples of desirable behavior by identifying examples of their thought processes, admitting when they don't know the answer and discussing ways to find it, and relating specific instructional strategies that can encourage others to become independent learners (Smey-Richman, 1989).
Motivation	This strategy is utilized by instructors to enhance motivation of their students by providing a learning environment that involves authentic and relevant learning activities and instilling in students a sense of control over their own situation by allowing them to make decisions on how to organize their time and effort (Smey-Richman, 1989).
PReP	PreReading Plan is a strategy that allows for presentation of new concepts regardless of the medium, e.g. text, lecture, film, demonstration (Jones, Palinscar, Ogle & Carr, 1987).
Role Playing	This is a strategy in which students, by assuming the role of another person, can formulate hypotheses on how that person should respond (Smey-Richman, 1989).
Schema Selection	Schema Selection is a strategy providing for the construction of an informal diagram (a semantic map or web) of students' prior knowledge about a topic. This activity serves to organize information and remind students that they can only understand what is new in relation to what they already know (Pearson, 1981).
Statewide Job Placement Service (SJPS)	This is a vocational school-based service dedicated to improving placement among vocational students of Missouri (Instructional Materials Laboratory, 1990).
Strategies	Strategies are the intuitive choices that learners make to help them construct meaning from any learning activity (Gilles, Bixby, Crowley, Crenshaw, Henrichs, Richards & Pyle, 1988). They provide specific procedures or ways of executing a given skill (Jones et al., 1987) and are defined as planned deliberate activities used to acquire and retain knowledge (Reid, 1988).
VIMS	The Vocational Instructional Management System is a systematic approach to defining and measuring the knowledge, skills, and attitudes students need to acquire in specific occupational areas (Instructional Materials Laboratory 1990).

Q. Why is Learning About Strategies Useful?

A. Deshler and Schumaker (1984) indicate that students who "learn how to learn" in secondary schools will be in a much better position to learn new skills and to respond to rapidly changing information and conditions in the future. The strategies discussed in this module are grounded in the belief that learning is purposeful. These strategies can be used in both group and individual settings to provide opportunities for students to work independently or collaboratively. It is hoped that by presenting a general strategy students can adapt and use the strategies to aid their own learning.

The purpose of this module is to provide the instructor and student with strategies to teach and acquire knowledge in the area of business and office technology. These strategies focus primarily on the area of written communications and provide many opportunities to integrate academics with vocational competencies. The two Vocational Instructional Management System (VIMS) competencies discussed in this module include Using Written Communication Skills (competency #070601 C001-010) and Seeking a Job (competency #070601 J010).

Q. What Types of Strategies Might be Used?

A. The two types of strategies this module will address include *Instructional/teaching* and *Cognitive/learning* strategies. Traditionally, instructional strategies have been structured in such a way that activities are the focus; they are predetermined by the teacher who has been responsible for planning, obtaining and organizing materials. These activities are based on the teacher's knowledge and learning goals. Recent research has focused on the notion that if the students and teacher share responsibility for planning and obtaining materials and treat learning as based on student's and teacher's knowledge, questions and interests, then critical thinking and problem solving abilities are enhanced.

Instructional/teaching strategies include those activities the teacher, acting as a facilitator, plans in order to enable students of all learning abilities to acquire the information being presented.

Cognitive/learning strategies are those techniques which grow out of the needs of individual learners and enable students to construct meaning.

Q. Why are Instructional/Teaching Strategies and Cognitive/ Learning Strategies Important?

A. Frequently students with special needs have acquired few techniques for learning. Any techniques which have been acquired may be effective some of the time, but often are not effective. This may result in students' losing interest and motivation for acquiring new information. In addition, these students often are not actively involved in learning because they have not been given opportunities to actively engage in the learning process. The challenge faced by teachers working with both special and regular education students is to transform these passive learners into learners who are more actively involved by providing them with effective strategies for actively engaging in the learning process (Gleason, 1988). These cognitive strategies enable students to confront new information and/or situations with a strategy plan which allows for successful learning.

Q. What is an Example of an Instructional/Teaching Strategy That Could be Used for Mastering Competencies in Written Communication Skills?

A. The use of word processing programs for personal computers facilitates the writing process and gives students valuable practice on equipment likely to be used in an actual office setting (Gilles et al., 1988). Computers and word-processing programs such as Applewriter, Appleworks, Bank Street Writer, PFS Writes, MECC Writer and Free Writer may be used to achieve the following:

- an introduction to students to the concept of word processing: how a computer works, keyboarding skills and how to use floppy disks;
- engagement in prewriting activities of brainstorming, listing, categorizing and semantic mapping;
- exposure of students to work in progress as the instructor models a piece of his/her own work (according to Englert, 1984, modeling has been shown to be an effective instructional procedure for students with mild handicaps and low levels of achievement);
- invitation to students working in pairs or small groups to begin composing a rough draft;
- printing out rough copies, making corrections on the copies and then on the monitor;

- revision and editing as a group by making several copies of one draft that students can discuss;

- allowing the students to read the writing sample focusing first on the meaning it conveys;

- after getting input from others about making the suggested revisions, the piece can be examined from the standpoint of sentence structure and more surface features (spelling, capitalization and punctuation). This is the editing phase.

After students become familiar with the writing process on subjects of interest to them and have some experience with peer editing, they can begin to apply the skills gained in the writing process to the writing associated with business and office technology.

Q. What is an Example of a Cognitive/Learning Strategy the Student Might use to Acquire the Competency?

A. Proofing is a cognitive strategy essential to achieving competencies in written language. According to Gleason (1988), written communication, if meant to be shared, requires proofreading to identify errors. Establishing a proofreading habit is most efficiently accomplished when students are proofreading text that is meaningful to them. The COPS strategy developed by Schumaker, Nolan and Deshler (1985) for use with learning disabled adolescents provides structure by using a mnemonic (acronym) involving the following sequence:

C *Capitalization:* "Have I capitalized the first word and proper names?"
O *Overall appearance:* "How does the piece look over all?"
P *Punctuation:* "Have I put in commas and end punctuation?"
S *Spelling:* "Have I spelled all the words correctly?"

To augment the COPS strategy, Archer & Gleason (1990) suggest a strategy which might be useful: "If you think you have misspelled a word:

a. look for the word in the assignment,
b. look for the word in the text material, and
c. look in the glossary. If you can't find the word, underline the word" (p. 57).

Q. What is Another Strategy for Assessing the Appearance of a Paper?

A. Using the strategy H.O.W., Archer and Gleason (1990) list the following steps for assessing the appearance of a paper:

H = Heading

1. Name
2. Date
3. Subject
4. Page number, if needed

O = Organized

1. On the front side of paper
2. Left margin
3. Right margin
4. At least one blank line at top
5. At least one blank line at bottom
6. Good spacing

W = Written Neatly

1. Words or numbers on the lines
2. Words or numbers written neatly
3. Neat erasing and crossing out

Q. What is an Example of a Strategy for Revising a Paper?

A. A strategy for revising a paper (MacArthur & Graham, 1987) follows:

- Read the essay
- Find the sentence that tells what the paper is about. Is it clear?
- SCAN each sentence.

  S - Does it make *Sense?*
  C - Is it *Connected* to the assignment?
  A - Can I *Add* more?
  N - *Note* errors.

Reread and make final changes.

Deshler and Lenz (1989) contend that it is helpful if the mnemonic word or image used is closely related to the strategy process desired. Hence, SCAN, which involves a look over the page, may be more easily remembered and trigger the appropriate strategy.

Q. What is an Example of an Instructional Strategy the Teacher Might use for Locating Local Sources of Occupational Information to Help Students Seek Jobs?

A. An example of such a strategy might be to engage in "Schema Selection" in order to activate previous knowledge. This involves connecting what the student already knows or has experienced with new material. There are several ways to access previous knowledge (Gilles et al., 1988). These include:

1. Brainstorming or listing: Writing down everything already known about a given topic.
2. Semantic webbing: Using a topic or key idea for the center and radiating out from the center with expanding ideas.
3. Partner discussion: Talking with partners or groups about what they already know or have experienced about a topic.
4. Using pictures or other visual aids to activate previous knowledge through writing or discussion.

Q. How can This Strategy be Implemented in the Classroom?

A. Using the semantic webbing strategy, the instructor solicits from the students possible careers in the area of business (see chart on Careers in Business and Office Technology). Start by brainstorming possible jobs in business and office technology. Select volunteers to go to the board and list as many jobs as possible that relate to business. Construct a semantic web or cognitive map to help organize the list of occupations into categories. The students then decide which occupation they want to research, and work in pairs or independently to collect information relating to their selected occupation. After locating places of business in the community, setting up interviews and collecting job descriptions, students can compile the data into separate "Skinny Books" on each occupation. A "Skinny Book" is a short book that deals with one concept (Goodman & Watson, 1977). For the investigation into careers in business, one skinny book could address the duties of a particular job. Another skinny book could focus on the different types of office equipment or specialized vocabulary associated with a particular job. These can be shared with other class members and become part of a resource library for the classroom.

Q. What is an Instructional Strategy That Prepares Students for Presentation of new Concepts?

A. The PReP (PreReading Plan) developed by Langer and Smith-Burke (1982) is a strategy that involves three activities:

1. Elicits initial associations with the concept: "Tell me anything that comes to mind when you think of..." The instructor accepts and records all responses in a non-judgmental manner on the board or overhead.
2. Generates reflection on initial associations: "What made you think of...?" This helps students link what they already know to what they might learn.
3. Leads students in refining and reformulating their knowledge: "Based on our discussion, have you any new ideas about...?"

Q. Are There Additional Avenues for Gaining Information About Careers in Business?

A. A follow up activity might be to consult SJPS. As mentioned in the definition section, SJPS is a school-based service dedicated to improving placement among vocational students in Missouri. One of its features includes a resource library containing books, videos, film cassettes, etc., dealing with career/job search information. A list of resources is available in an annotated catalog which can be obtained by calling or writing SJPS (Instructional Materials Laboratory, 1990). Using the list from the handbook the student could map various job opportunities.

Q. What is an Example of a Cognitive/Learning Strategy the Student Might use for Seeking a job?

A. One strategy to help a student learn how to seek a job on his/her own (VIMS# 070601 J001) is to locate organizations that provide opportunities for the students to become familiar with business/student organizations which, according to the Instructional Materials Laboratory (1990), offer valuable links between the classroom and the business world. One such organization is Future Business Leaders of America-Phi Beta Lambda, Inc. (FBLA-PBL), an association of high school and postsecondary students studying business or business education careers.

A cognitive strategy to use in the classroom provides students with questions to consider when beginning to think about looking for a job. Some key questions include:

Who	Who can I go to when looking for a job?
What	What kinds of jobs interest me?
When	When are the best hours for me to work?
Where	Where are the jobs I am interested in located?
How	How will I get to my job?

The class could brainstorm as a group as the teacher records responses. (See *Questioning Strategy* in appendix). Each student could then develop his/her own chart to use as a guide when investigating potential jobs.

Q. What is an Example of a Cognitive/Learning Strategy That Would Integrate the Process of Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening?

A. For the VIMS competency, Practicing interviewing for a job (#070601 J010), a strategy, "Views and Interviews," (Crenshaw, 1988), focuses on questioning strategies that can lead to developing questions to ask a potential employer. After brainstorming some possible questions that would give the desired information and writing it down for the class to see, students select and write 3-4 of the "best" questions. The students then role play by finding a partner and interviewing each other, avoiding questions which elicit only "yes" or "no" responses. After the interviews, the class discusses and evaluates the merits of the questions by deciding which ones elicited sparse responses, which ones allow the interviewer to elaborate and which ones could have been used as follow-up questions.

Suggest that the students refine their questions and make arrangements to interview personnel in the school about their choice of occupations, and then branch out to persons occupying positions in business in the local community. Students can integrate what they have learned about writing by contacting a potential interviewee with a letter of introduction and a request for an interview. A follow-up to these interviews could be student written summaries of the experience and thank you letters to each individual interviewed.

Q. What are Some Additional Resources That I Could use With my Class to Facilitate Success in the Study of Business Education?

A. Some additional resources which can provide assistance to the business educator include:

Future Business Leaders of America - Phi Beta Lambda, Inc. (FBLA-PBL). Membership includes high school and college students interested in pursuing business careers.

Patti Lake, Advisor
FBLA/PBL State Supervisor for Business and Office Education
Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
PO Box 480
Jefferson City, MO 65102
(314) 751-3484

Other resources include:

Missouri Vocational Resource Center
Instructional Materials Laboratory
University of Missouri-Columbia
2316 Industrial Drive
Columbia, MO 65202
(314) 882-2883 or (800) 669-2465

Missouri LINC
401 East Stewart Road
University of Missouri-Columbia
Columbia, MO 65211
(314) 882-2733 or (800) 392-0533 (Missouri only)

A computer linked network of 21 public area vocational schools and community colleges has produced a pamphlet describing a job placement program which could be helpful to both teachers and students:

Project HIRE (Helping Industry Recruit Employees)
Joe Herndon Area Vocational Technical School
11501 East 350 Highway
Raytown, MO 64138
(816) 737-6315

A video "Got a Job Interview? Learn the Skills" on job search/interviewing is available for $6.50 which includes postage (25 minutes long). This video is intended for secondary, postsecondary, agency, guidance and education personnel interested in using video technology to assist students in meeting self-knowledge and educational and occupational exploration and career planning competencies. It is produced by:

Colorado Career Development Video Review Project
School of Occupational and Educational Studies
Colorado State University
Fort Collins, CO 80523
(303) 491-7580

Boyer-Stephens, A. & Johnson, J. (1988). Access skills: Vocational readiness skills for business and office.

Instructional Materials Laboratory
10 London Hall
University of Missouri-Columbia
Columbia, MO 65211
(314) 882-2883 or (800) 669-2465

VIMS Competencies Corresponding to This Module

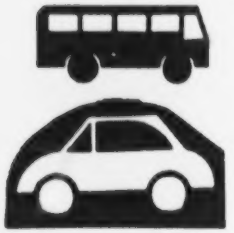
Using Written Communication Skills (VIMS competency #070601 0010)

1. Use correct sentence structure
2. Capitalize and abbreviate words in business letters
3. Punctuate sentences using commas, semicolons, and apostrophes
4. Use commonly confused words and terms correctly
5. Type numbers in business letters
6. Type hyphens and dashes correctly
7. Spell words correctly in typed copy
8. Choose verbs which agree with given subjects
9. Revise sentence into complete and concise statements
10. Compose and type request letters

Seeking a Job (VIMS competency #070601 J001 0009)

1. Locate local sources of occupational information
2. Compare public and private employment services
3. Research a potential employer
4. Complete a job application form
5. Compose and type a letter of inquiry
6. Compose and type a letter of application
7. Make a telephone inquiry about an advertised job
8. Compose and type a letter requesting a reference
9. Prepare a resume
10. Practice interviewing for a job
11. Describe employment tests
12. Compose and type a follow up letter

Questioning Strategy



Who?	*What?*	*When?*	*Where?*	*How?*
Who can I go to when looking for a job?	What kinds of jobs interest me?	When during the day-time or evening should I work?	Where are the jobs located?	How will I get to my job?

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Careers in Business and Office Technology

Salary?

Machine Operators: Billing, Bookkeeping and Computing

On-the-job Training?

Secretaries

Typists

Benefits?

Opportunities for Advancement?

Receptionists

Office Manager

Bookkeepers

Cashiers

File Clerks

Computer Programmers

Transportation/ Accessibility?

Travel Opportunities?

Dress Code?

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